

# Remembrances of Air Force life...



## \*Cpl Pandey G.S.

### Remembrances of Air Force life part 1

#### \*Cpl Pandey G.S.

Please pronounce Cpl as कॉपल 'Kopal' / 'kɒp(ə)l/ not as C.P.L.

Some people enter into one's life and create an imprint of their personality forever. One such person in my life was Corporal Gouri Shankar Pandey.

It was 15<sup>th</sup> August of 2000, to be precise. I was one of the invitees, as head of accounts department, for the *Bada Khana* function in one of the Airman Messes of Air Force Station Pune. Routine affair for us to attend special lunches hoisted on National Holidays.

I was drawn to a beautiful decoration and thoughtful quote written in the most attractive manner. I could not stop to find who was behind this floral arrangement and Calligraphic display. There came Cpl Pandey in the most polite manner to greet me. Later, on behalf of Airmen (Nowadays they are named as 'Air warriors') living in the billets he received a gift of six Rum bottles for the good work they displayed. I was impressed with his humble nature and immediately asked him to report to the Accounts Section next day for making some displays, I planned in the entrance and waiting hall etc.

'Sir, I will certainly come, but I am already handfull with some commitments given by my commanding officer.' He said. 'Plus my duties are in shifts, if it is ok with him and you, I can come at night and do what you want me to do. I study in Spare time. I am a student of Abhinav art College in Pune city.' He did not turn up the next day in my office. Later I found that his boss did not allow attending any jobs besides his squadron's own, on and off duty hours!

Months passed. We never met. On 26<sup>th</sup> Jan 2001 Bhuj and many parts of Kutch-Saurashtra trembled like a castle of playing cards with severe earthquake. Pune Air base station became very busy in handling casualties and tons of dispatches from all quarters. I remember, present Chief of Air Staff, (the then Group Captain AKN Browne as Chief Ops Officer) handled the situation on war footing admirably well. Aid started pounding at Air Force Station from all over national and International levels. Everyone was sad and deep in grief. Moreover Air Force Station Bhuj was badly damaged. Building of hangers and workshops crumbled. Runway needed huge repairs. Much causality of Airmen, Officers and their families were reported. Day and night sorties started shuttling when the only runway was made serviceable by surviving MES and Air force-Army Jawan staff. Injured were being admitted in Army and other Hospitals. No one was strictly permitted to board Aircraft to meet dear ones in Bhuj Air Force Station. We were working on three shifts for the newly allotted duties to tackle emergency call.

My office was just a few meters away from the parking bay of AN 32s. I was overseeing the loading of material reached from huge international cargo flights. There in twilight, I received a smart salute. Greeting him back, I asked, 'Yes Cpl, what do you want?'

'Sir, Do you remember me? I am Cpl Pandey. I could not do your office work. Sir, I am sorry. Orders were not given to report to you Sir. I am really sorry for that.' Voice was a sincere apology.

'Ok, what are you doing here in this hell of time?' finding him standing near to the aircraft, where no one was permitted to be without specific duty. I was harsh in my tone. The starting of plane engines created a deafening effect. In that condition, He said, 'Sir, I want to go in this Aircraft to Bhuj!' Barely could I hear what he said, but more than that I could not understand his requirement to go to that god forsaken place, unless someone personally related was to be attended.

'Why?' Don't you know the plight there? What makes you go there?' My voice was loud and clear for him to know. 'Sir, I know, therefore I want to go for rescue affected people.'

'No need. Our staff is there to look after our families.' I said firmly.

Meanwhile the aircraft started rolling and soon got out of sight. Looking at that Cpl Pandey took a deep breath. Shaking head in negation, he said, 'There is no one belonging to me. I need not be a burden to our station staff. They are capable of handling situations there. I am sure'.

Shaking his head in disgust he uttered, 'Sir, Do we need to have only blood relations to go for rescue? Who so ever, every one, shattered and weathered humans, are they not ours? Who will look after them? For them there is no Air Force to help. If I do not reach them now, what is the use of my living? I will go for them, make my body and soul available. Which way, I don't know. But some ones need me there. I cannot sit tight and work in these sedentary duties. Call of hour is great to everyone. Well to me, it is a life and death situation. I want to go at any cost'.

His harsh and touchy words made me shiver in my uniform. Never ever I thought like this. Hundreds of dead and wounded on roads and under debris were like me, human beings. Were they not my relations? Mere blood and ritually connected are mine? How come I don't feel hurt and aggrieved about unknown fellows? Well If my mind set is not so sensitive, what could I do this fellow? Was it possible for me to at least comprehend his call for? Caught in a puzzle, wordless in mouth, nodded and with tears in eyes. 'Cpl Pandey you are wasting time here. Go

at once.'

'Yes Sir', looking in my moist eyes, in the most obedient manner, He pleaded, ' Sir, I have taken 15 days annual leave. Got sufficient money by borrowing from friends and colleagues. Have a costly camera to shoot places where no one likes to go. Sir, I know, you are a Station Welfare Officer too. Seeing you standing here, I could not help but to reach out to you. Even though you may not have a good opinion about me due to last time. I am sincerely praying to you. Please somehow put in the next possible rescue aircraft. I promise you sir; I will not let you down this time!' My hand gestures were not so firm and resolute. I said, 'Cpl Pandey, I don't know how but let me try. Meanwhile another aircraft crawled in. Door of the cockpit opened. Crew members started climbing down. Fatigued and worn out by constant grueling travel, some of them felt dry and thirsty. Waiting for the Air crew van to take to the restroom came to for help. 'Sir, horrible is the word, Witnessing from a height there is hardly any house or dwelling which is not affected. Our station is in shambles. Ferrying since early morning, I feel tired.' Known crew member greeted me with a salute and jumped in the crew van waiting for him.

Looking towards Cpl Pandey, I said, 'You wait here. Let me talk to the Captain of Aircraft.'

'Yes Sir. I will bring my hand bag' he said cheerfully. He disappeared in the crowd of the persons getting down slowly. I came back to my office, lifted the phone. Ring cranked and voice said, 'Crewroom Sir', ' Please call for Captain of AN 32 just landed. I waited for some time. 'Hellow', vice said. 'Well I am Wg Cdr Oak. Narrated him in short. Listening carefully, he said, 'let me try Sir'.

'Thanks, I will leave him to you', saying I dropped the receiver. Lifted on the sidecap, looking at the watch slowly walked towards my car. I saw Cpl Pandey standing near the ladder entrance for crewmen. I showed 'thumbs up'. He saluted from long distance. While driving home I felt satisfied that this boy should be on the plane soon.

But it was not to be!.....

continued...

# Remembrances of Air Force life...



## \*Cpl Pandey G.S.

### Remembrances of Air Force life part 2.

#### Cpl G.S. Pandey

#### **Cpl Pandey was missing!**

Next day on reaching office, I tried to find what happened to Cpl Pandey?

‘Sir, there was much commotion yesterday; One Cpl trying to sneak in the Aircraft was caught by Air Force Police staff on round. He was brought down and the aircraft got delayed for about 15 minutes. Don’t know the name but he may be in a Guardroom cell.’ Voice was curt and sharp. Guardroom Warrant Officer In charge when contacted by my staff said, ‘I joined the duty just now. Will let you know soon.’ Puzzled about his whereabouts, I became more curious. I asked my staff to find out his office attendance. I sent one living in Airman from his billet to search his bags and other luggage. Both places got negative reports. Cpl Pandey was missing!

Leaving the issue at that, I got involved in my office work and the additional task of supervising rescue aircrafts. Days passed. Weeks went by. One day Cpl Pandey was in my office door! A bit surprised and annoyed, I said ‘Where were you, young man for all these days?’

‘Sir, Sorry, I could not keep in touch with you and had put you in grief for nothing. After reporting for duty, I have rushed to your office, for only you will understand my feelings’.

Looking at my office desk, files piled up and often phone bell ringing and meetings at hand, I had no other option but to tell him, ‘not now come some day later’. But my mind was lingering with his thoughts. I could not have

waited for more days. What happened to him? Did he reach his destination? Was the Air force harsh in dealing with him? Was his AWOL( Absent without leave) period regularized? Did he succeed in his mission to rescue persons he felt they were awaiting? Thoughtful of the events, I did not bother to look him up. Sipping a hot cup of tea, I put my head on the issues needing my attention.

‘Sir, Can I meet you at your residence?’ Voice was familiar but came from the other door which my staff used. That was Cpl Pandey again! ‘Sir , Please allow me to come to your quarter. I cannot wait for more. Sir please...’

I too felt that was good idea. Agreeing to request, he was in my 91/B quarter by sharp 8 O’clock. A friend of him brought him on bike. He was introduced to family members. Seeing Airmen had come to meet Dad, children were not so happy. Wife Alka, sent out tea tray by a servant. But tea went cold, when he started narrating, ‘Sir, I was removed unceremoniously. But that captain of the Aircraft winked at me and said in hush hush voice, ‘Fella, be here, I will carry you next time.’ After dinner, I waited behind your office in darkness. Around wee hours the same Aircraft returned. When crew came back for final take off, I suddenly went to Sir, Salute him. ‘Are you still here? He looked puzzled. He then told me to go in his cockpit cabin and squeeze. Let us hope you don’t get caught this time!’ Cpl Pandey said, ‘I kept wondering how come strict crew was so kind to me? When Aircraft reached a certain height, the second pilot took over charge and the Captain looked at me closely and asked what is inside your overcoat? Embarrassed, I opened the button, took out water bottle and offered to him! Having a sip he said, ‘how many?’ When I showed other seven water bottles stitched tight to coat, he could not believe his eyes! I felt you never know, someone may be thirsty, hence I went to billet and stitched at night and got ready for your call Sir’.

‘Ya, very clueful of you! Alright, be here, get lost when we get down.’ Before going back to his seat he said, ‘Oak Sir told me about you. Last words he said hit me. He said, ‘Your mission of carrying tons of aid material is futile if this single soul does not reach Bhuj’. From that I could get why he was so kind to me!

### **Changed Scenario!**

Cpl Pandey’s friend’s hands were all the time holding something. Asked what is it? He said, ‘Sir, Pandey had taken 300 snaps! This is the album of it.’ And many stories started unfolding. Cpl Pandey started narrating, in his own style, ‘Sir, Look in this snap, at some remote village place, name I don’t know, full houses collapsed. The rescue team had not even reached. The bodies were covered with flies. I managed to call one person who came in search of his relatives. Both of us recovered a couple of lives still struggling to survive.

Holding another snap in hand, Cpl Pandey said, ‘Sir, here I lost my purse! I went to buy food for someone on the roadside. The purse was left on the opposite side of his *Thela*. Meanwhile some other people came and bought and went away. On realizing, when I went back to *thelawala* the purse had vanished! Along with money I lost Identity card. For that I had to undergo Court of Inquiry!

Sir, this one has some background. When I went after losing money and I card to other places. Seeing me empty handed and without money, they started abusing! ‘Look this fellow; he must have eaten the aid given by the people and governments.’ When I told them with folded hands, ‘I had lost my purse and had not eaten for many hours.’ They took me to their tents and provided milk, water and biscuits. Then I took some young lads for rescue around places. There one camel was wounded and desperately trying to stand on its feet. Some boys called more people and with the help of long planks camel could move with great difficulty. Realizing impossibility we took

water to its mouth. It drank some sips and took its last breath. Sir, there I witnessed how death takes place! Many places ladies were safe because they had come out of houses for some sundry work. Nearby school buildings collapsed but being 26<sup>th</sup> Jan, children had assembled on ground for flag hoisting and were saved! I was moved by one by one stories coming out with the help of snaps! You seem to be a good photographer? I asked, 'Yes Sir, But I had to sell off the costly camera.' That is how I could come back to Air Force Station Bhuj! This mission made me totally broke. On top of it I had to face disciplinary action!'

'Sir, No problem about that, but I am very much satisfied. I wanted to reach out to the people. And I did up to my ability. Thanks to Indian Air Force. Without which I could never have ventured to reach there! Sir let me tell you the irony of fate!'

'Sir, after the aircraft landed at Bhuj air strip, early in the morning, I got down along with Captain of the aircraft as a crew member. I was taken to their crew room. I took snacks and returned to the aircraft. Unloading was going on. But there was commotion all over. Everyone was shouting at each other. Material was getting mixed before counting and accounting could take place. Seeing that melee between aid agencies, I could not keep quiet. I suddenly shouted in a loud voice and asked them to stop work at once. They looked puzzled and wanted to know who that shouting at them was? I pulled up myself and stood with a firm stance and said, 'No one is going to touch the aid material without my permission. I am from the Air Force. With full authority to control the accounting and I will supervise the distribution. Please cooperate with me. Otherwise I will call Air Force Police and you will be behind bars!' My commanding voice and Air Force Uniform impressed the gathering. Some senior persons came to me and showed their credentials and asked me to lead the distribution of already accounted aid material. I told them, 'Don't worry, I am here with you. But I have not come as boss; I am part of your team'. Soon I took over the charge of the situation. Seeing this, Airmen from Bhuj Station called me to the airman mess. I had a bellyful of Lunch. There I met my old pal. I told him to manage a two wheeler for me. He promptly handed over the keys of a bike of his friend who was away on TD. (Temporary Duty)

By the evening, senior dignitaries had visited the Airport. I was introduced to them. They said since he had taken charge, the distribution had been systematic and without any hustle. They shook my hand, asked me to come along with them. Soon I was sitting in front of the District Collector! He greeted me and said, 'we appreciate the discipline of the Air force. Good that they have sent a representative all the way from Pune!'

Wondering the irony of fate, here I was like a roaring lion and a few hours back, I was hiding to get into an aircraft! I looked at myself, my dress was shabby and my cap looked without brasso lusterless! But my chest was proud. I worked there the next day. Meanwhile, airmen from Logistics section came and Junior Warrant Officer took charge from me! I was now free to do what I wanted to do. Having a bike tank full, I started for badly hit areas. Without a map, I just started to go wherever the road took me. Stray dogs used to run after my bike like mad. They seemed to be affected by the nature's wrath! Somehow managing to keep balance, I thought of your words, 'Cpl Pandey, you are wasting time, what are you doing here? You should be there where they need you the most'.

'I used to kick up and go further. Later I moved from Main Street to small bumpy roads, looking for distant villages standing on sand dunes. I had to drag the bike for some kilometers to reach the petrol Pump. My friend had to come in search of me to take back to Bhuj from the sandy puzzle. Night will not be enough for telling the story behind these snaps.'

‘Sir, you should be getting late for night. May I take your leave? Before that I have something for you. He put his hand in his pocket and took out a small piece of earthen pot like something. ‘Sir, to be honest with you, I have picked up from some broken and empty home. But once it must have been full of joy and vigor. I want to keep this in your possession as remembrance of inspiration.

As if that piece is telling me, ‘I am not destined to be in isolation with misery and poverty, I belong to a place of peace and prosperity. It was kept on my office table till I was in charge....

... Cpl Pandey came back for help again!... ‘Now what? I asked him with a question mark on my face!

Continued...

Cpl Pandey G.S.

## Remembrances of Air Force life...



## \*Cpl Pandey G.S.

### Remembrances of Air Force life part 3.

**Men like GS Pandey are genius and they are above all expectations.**

My mind went back... I was getting in my car around 2 O'clock, after pack up for the day, Pawar, the office boy, placed a briefcase by the side. I could see in the rear view someone approaching me stealthily. Looking at my frowning, a smart salute followed the voice, 'Good afternoon Sir, This is Cpl Pandey reporting'!

'Yes, Cpl Pandey, what do you want now? I said. 'Nothing Sir, I was waiting for you here as you were to pack up for the day. So I could speak to you. I was rather afraid to come and meet you in your office.'

'Sir, I know, whenever I meet you, something happens and then I feel that your face does not appear happy.' Smiling at his funny approach, 'That's right' I said. 'Good news, Sir, tomorrow is Saturday. And there is going to be an art exhibition in Balgandharva Kala Dalaan, from my co students of Abhinav College. They have put up a show. Sir I have come with an invitation but I don't have a card. Display of artistic pottery of Ahmed Ghulam Kumhar is also going to be there. 'And I have a special request for you. Please come in uniform Sir.' Looking at his enthusiasm, I said, 'Ok.'

Next day my car turned for the parking lot, Cpl Pandey in a smart civil dress was there to receive me. Bracing up his chest, looking at my ceremonial dress, he greeted me with lavish praise, 'Sir, You look very handsome Sir'.

The exhibition was really impressive. Boys had put up their artistic work in a neat and beautiful manner. On that day they were to be given prizes for the competitions conducted earlier, I was told.

Meanwhile Cpl Pandey went missing! After some time, he came with the faculty staff of the college. He



introduced me to them. Shaking hand one of them said, 'Sir, we know so much about you, that only meeting in person was left. 'GS' had told all about you and the Air force'. To them Cpl Pandey G.S. was 'GS'!

'Sir, because of his efforts; we had courage to put up a fight with our management' One remarked. The other said, 'Sir, today's venue could not have been possible without his efforts.'

'Sir, We don't treat GS as students but as our staff member on many occasions. His approach toward the arts had opened the eyes of many. When he starts talking to students we feel he is an instructor rather than a student. He is all the time in search of something to unveil. We were very much impressed about his efforts about Potter Kumhar. Generally we don't allow outsiders to join for the display program, but because of GS we had courage to help a co artist who had lost everything including his family members.' Nodding my head in appreciation my eyes searched for Cpl Pandey. He was missing! I could exchange pleasantries with other co students of his college. Most of them were in their teens, GS was at least 10 years senior to them. He was elderly figure them and more friendly to the teaching staff. 'Sir, GS when he starts a speech we remain spell bound. His English is so fluent and graceful that even the Principal also thinks twice to talk to him in English! We talk to him in Hindi, but he replies only in English. Some of us wonder if Pandey surname means person from UP- Bihar area how come he avoids speaking in Hindi?

One staff person said in Marathi to me, '*Saheb*, he had organized a strike in support of staff and students which was successful because of his forceful arguments and strong and hard tone. I was thrilled to know a low ranked airman from the Air Force could command so much of respect and admiration. I said, 'He is from West Bengal and not from UP Or Bihar'.

Cpl Pandey came to me and said, 'Sir, please come with me. He took me to one corner. There I saw Kumhar Ahmed for the first time. He was an old man. He had displayed many of his pottery items in a neat manner. Folding his hands, '*Salaam Saab*', he greeted me with a slight bend in his back. 'He is our Saab, because of who you are here'. '*Meharbani Janab*', He said. In praise of his work I bought a piece of pottery suiting my purse.

...And then I recalled, one day the doorbell rang impatiently, I opened the door of my quarter house. Seeing Cpl Pandey, I screamed, 'What are you doing here?' 'Sir, urgent requirement. Don't mind if I come inside and bother you?' 'Meet me in my office, not here?' His face told me quite a bit of worry. Looking his face down, I said, 'Ok, come and sit'.

'Sir, I need some dictation from you'. He directly came to the point. 'Have tea first. So he sat in a chair. Then he started to narrate; Sir, only you can help me'. Looking at him, I said, 'Seems, with you I am the only guy to help you and the entire world is against you!'

'Yes Sir, only you can understand me. Luckily you happen to be a Station Welfare Officer, so I can seek your guidance without formal procedural hassles.'

'Sir, something had happened. After I returned from Bhuj, I used to go to Command Military Hospital to see quake affected civilian patients. One day, I saw one old man sitting by the side of the road. I had actually stopped to feed biscuits to a laying stray dog. That old man told me that he was spared by the wrath of nature but rest all members died in front of his eyes. One son got hurt seriously. He was admitted. He being major, Hospital authorities said they cannot admit him as his caretaker. His name was Ahemad Kumhar. He was penny less. I

borrowed some money from friends, but he refused to take alms. He said he can earn money if he helps to get some instruments and clay. He is a potter. His artistic pottery skills have been praised by many national and international people. He showed me some pages of write ups by some people. I managed to get some needed instruments and raw clay. He showed me some pieces. But given proper clay and material, he will stand on his feet and look after himself'.

'Sir with your letter of reference, I can go to many known persons like Anu Agha Madam, Rahul Bajaj sir and some more to seek their help. He gave the requirement. Sipping a cup of tea, I started to dictate a small letter addressed to all industrialists and personalities with a philanthropic approach. In the end, he said, 'Sir, if you don't mind, may I add one sentence? I said, 'Go ahead; I don't mind if you change the entire draft. But bring the typed letter tomorrow morning for signature'.

'Don't worry sir; a printed letter will be there on your table tomorrow morning by 7:30.' Soon he disappeared!

Next day morning, after attending a working parade for my staff, I moved to my office. Hanging side cap to hat rack, reached to my revolving chair. There I saw a beautiful pad, on it a printed letter attracting my attention! I could not resist the temptation to read immediately. Soon I got engrossed in reading. Wondering, is this the same letter I dictated? And I looked at it carefully. It was not printed. But hand written but looked as if printed!

So much was the beauty of his calligraphic presentation and glossy paper. Last sentence was, 'We the armed force personnel can appreciate the art. But we need the assistance of those who are writers, painters, sculptors and admirers of artists and their arts. If you don't come forward, who will? Cpl Pandey from Air Force Station Pune had taken up the task to combine synergy to help old man, Ahmed Ghulam Kumhar, earthen potter from Bhuj, Kutch to establish in life from nothing. Please contribute to the cause of art of pottery'. Reading that letter, I was moved by the sheer compassion it emphasized. As I was about to sign it, I felt by appending my signature am I going to spoil the presentation and beauty of that letter? With utmost caution and care I signed it.

That letter created wonder. Cpl Pandey could generate a substantial amount. With that Kumhar went to Bhuj and came back with many pottery making instruments and clay. He started to sell potteries and wealthy persons and many corporate houses bought them. In Meanwhile his son was cured...

Once he said, 'It is not merely getting a degree of arts but as an artist our heart should be of an artist. If you don't feel the throbbing of other artists, it is shame on you guys, shame'. Those harsh words impressed the art college staff and students. So we decided to invite Kumhar to be an honorary participant of this presentation. One senior college staff member told me with pride.

Meanwhile I was asked to join for the prize distribution. When I reached the hall, I was asked to be seated on dais next to Dr. Vijay Bhatkar's chair, whom I had not met personally. He was the chief guest for the function. I couldn't believe it. I said, 'Look, I have come here as a casual visitor at the request of Cpl Pandey. Don't put me on stage and that too next to Dr. Bhatkar! But they said, 'No Sir, you too are our college guest and not Cpl Pandey's alone'. Meanwhile, Dr. Vijay Bhatkar arrived and immediately the function started. As some briefing was going on Dr. Bhatkar looked at my uniform nameplate, extended his hand for shaking. He asked, 'Oh! Are you Wing Commander Oak? How wonderful! I have read your book in English. I had been to Naadi center. It was amazing!' In that short time he said in a low voice. Dr. Bhatkar asked the organizers to allow him to speak before the prize distribution, transgressing the protocol. He briefly spoke about art and how he was associated with this

college. His daughter was a student of this college etc. Changing the topic, suddenly he started to say, 'you students, you may not be aware of this person. He pointed towards me and said, 'He has written a wonderful book on Naadi Shastra, about which no one had written as yet. This is the amazing science of astrology. I presume he will explain it better in his speech.' Surprised at his announcement, I was not prepared to speak at the meet of artists.

He distributed some 25-30 prizes. Suddenly looking at the wristwatch, He said to the organizers, 'Please excuse me, I have another engagement. I am getting late. I suggest remaining prizes could be distributed by Wing Commander Oak.' Looking to my face gesturing negatively, He said, 'No No. You do it and start walking. When he was seen off, the function started again. And prizes were distributed through my hands.

Announcement was from dais, 'Now Wg Cdr Oak will speak a few words.' The entire function was conducted in Marathi except Dr. Bhatkar's address, which was in English. I wondered what was I to say and in which language? I went to dais. Referring to Principal and other teaching staff, I started, 'Pl pardon me, a person who had never drawn a picture or held artistic brush in hand and had no inclination to paint or to draw, has been asked to honour the artists and their creative art and hand over prizes to various artists' fraternity. Please pardon me; I am no way eligible for this job. But for Dr. Bhatkar's request, I would not have agreed for it. Now that he has asked me, let me say something about Naadi Shastra. Let me speak in Marathi, as most of the students are Maharashtrians. Before closing my address, I mentioned Cpl Pandey, 'Look boys, to whom you call 'GS', he is 'Cpl Pandey to me'. Address may be different, but the person is the same. 'Heart of poet, hands of a painter, vision of genius. One facet of his personality is before you, by way of Kumhar's artistic pottery work. He is the personification of Rabindranath Tagore. I am proud that Cpl Pandey belongs to Indian Air Force. In spite of his duties, he had developed his own hobbies and likes. I wish him the best and I stopped and sat. Clapping continued for a while, I cleared the place.

Next day, there was a call, 'Good Morning Sir. Sir, what is this? How come you never told me anything about this Naadi thing?' Smiling, I said, 'Not that I wanted to avoid, but every time you met some requirement and went away!'

'I want to know everything. Please!'

That please was so demanding, 'Yes, I will narrate you. Then one evening, sitting by the side of Officer's Mess area in Seventh heaven lawn restaurant near the swimming tank on Lohagaon road, I told him the wonder of Naadi.

'Sir, leave this now to me. I shall undertake the calligraphic aspect of this wonderful treatise. I am posted to 7 BRD. I will write to you from there.

Meanwhile I got posted to AF Stn Halwara. His letter started to come to that address.

From  
Cpl Pandey GS  
PW-II, 7 BRD AF  
A F Stn Tughlakabad  
New Delhi - 62.  
PIN- 110062.

~~Mr~~  
Wg Cdr S.J. Oak  
Senior Accounts Officer  
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Contd...

... 'Sir. Are you nephew of Capt P.N. Oak? Who was in Azad Hind Fauj with Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose? You never mentioned to me when we were In Pune?... Cpl Pandey asked with much surprise...

... It's done deal, I will go to Capt Oak Sir to salute him ... Said Cpl Pandey cheerfully....

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Remembrances of Air Force life

Cpl Pandey GS...

A Good Fellow!...

Concluding Part 4



**... ‘Sir. Are you the nephew of Capt P.N. Oak? Who was in Azad Hind Fauj with Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose? You never mentioned to me when we were in Pune?... Cpl Pandey asked with much surprise...  
... It’s done deal, I will go to Capt Oak Sir to salute him ... Said Cpl Pandey cheerfully.... “**

Special Postal Cover bearing his letter to my civil address.

Sure enough, when he came to meet me in my room at 9 Wing all the way from Tughlakabad, Delhi he narrated the meeting with Capt PN Oak in great detail. He said, ‘Sir I was with your uncle when I went to Pune on my next trip to attend the last of the papers at Pune University. He said, ‘Sir when I touched the feel of Captain Sir, I felt as if I was meeting Subhash Chandra Bose. I saluted him while taking his leave after some hours from his residence 10 Green Park Soc, off Baner road. I was lucky to meet Mrs Sadhana Oak madam, a very motherly old lady. I bought some of his memorable books. He too was happy to recollect some of his remembrances of Netaji Subhash Chandra Ji whom he revered as a mentor in his army days. He said, ‘while in my law college days, I once happened to attend his public meeting in Pune. That time I never thought that I would be so close as a Personal staff for some years in far east war torn countries. I joined the Army and was posted to Saigon, (presently Ho Chi Minh in Kampuchea). One day, I got a call saying would you like to join Azad Hind Fauj? After some careful thought, I decided to join. One officer came to take me to Singapore. It was just some months before Netaji appeared in Singapore from Germany. Soon I was in his near ones. However, being very junior was under some senior Officers like Gen Jagannath Rao Bhosale'.

He then narrated how Netaji was involved in that ghastly aeroplane accident. He said that he got first-hand information from Lt Col Habibur Rehman who was with him on the same flight. They both were in the same hospital where Netaji took his last breath. However, later on, this issue became sentimental and many versions started to come out. Due to his previous instances of escapes and daredevil acts and his plan to reach Russia too somehow got mixed up.

Time passed so quickly, I had to take his leave as I was to return back in time to catch the train. ‘Sir, I feel that the outlook of our history should change if we accept his pleader-like arguments and logic with due documentary records as proofs.' he said to me about Capt P.N. Oak's historical research. Sir, meanwhile I bought your book on the topic of Naadi. It is really fascinating. I feel like doing any service at the feet of ancient sages....!

Our meetings reduced, once I remember I had some official job in AF CAO at Subroto park in New Delhi. I wrote to him about my visiting dates. So we had one evening seating in the cafeteria near Arjun Cinema Hall. Freedom

between him and me was as per the norms of service requirements. However, I used to feel that his rank of Corporal should not be a barrier for me so long as we are connected with no official topics and likings. Later on, I retired in Jul 2003 and settled in Pune. One day he did come to our new house in Viman Nagar but somehow was not well received by my family members in my absence. I used to get his letters. But due to his other commitments and postings, we were not in touch with each other for many years. I did speak to him to know from him that he was commissioned in the Logistics branch and had picked the rank of Flight Lieutenant. However, he will remain imprinted in my memories as Cpl Pandey GS .... A Good Fellow!... One of his memorable beautifully handwritten letters is produced below:

## GS Pandey

7 BRD Air Force AF Stn Tughlakabad New Delhi - 110002

28 Aug 03

Resp. Sir

Please accept my regards and salutes. Hope you to be fine and restive.



I am in receipt of your letter No. 9W/Acts/13120 Pt. 1 dtd. 28 Jul 03, along with its enclosures, sevonier commemorating the first international reunion of Indian National Army veterans. My joy knew no bounds on receiving the sevonier back, sir. I consider that souvenir as one of my most prized-possessions, which I could acquire painstakingly. I cannot thank you enough for having taken the efforts to re-locate it during your busy schedule just before your retirement. *(I sent the reply to his previous letter in which he narrated the meeting with Capt Oak and INA etc pasting his adr on the*

*same and posted. But I didn't weigh it as much as what he wrote back in this letter! - This is that envelope cover I found through the internet.)*

I consider it my most essential duty to reply to your letter, with your permission Sir.

Concerning your letter sir, I beg to mention it to you, I am too insignificant and a junior person to accept your salutation - 'PRANAM'. I hope you would appreciate this refusal of mine to accept your Salutation.

You consider me to be your friend - I consider this to be the finest honour that I could attain so far in my life and I promise to stand true to this honour - in letter and spirit in my own way.

You also mentioned that the chances are rare that we would meet frequently - though it's only a sentence- but i can understand the decisiveness it denotes. I believe this one sentence of your letter

has successfully conveyed all the things unspoken, unuttered and unwritten. between you and me so far. You are very true and I am happy with your decision sir.

Also, I felt good about you that at least and at last you could express your decision clearly. To reply to that sentence of yours, gladly I seek to write, sir. Your wishes are my commands as usual. (P.T.O.-

2

Though I would definitely stand obedient to your decision as expressed by you in your letter. I hope you and Resp. Madam would continue to bless me despite my being far from you and all you family members - standing true to your decision.

I thankfully remember the kind support you all rendered during moments of pains, unrest and lack. I'd feel glad to be of any use that you'd like me to, be it in your Research work, or washing your used plates, Sir.

I also would like to visit you all, as and when I visit Pune, most dutifully.



**Adr. for correspondence.**

With regards from me,  
And my respected parents  
And heartfelt salutes-  
Ever

yours





G S Pandey

7 BRD Air Force  
AF Stn Tughlakabad  
New Delhi - 110 062

28 Aug 03

Resp. Sir.

Please accept my regards and Salutes.

Hope you to be fine and restore.

I am in receipt of your letter No. 9W/Accts/13120 Pt.1 dtd. 28 Jul 03 alongwith its enclosure, the souvenir commemorating the first International Re-union of Indian National Army Veterans.

My boys knew no bounds on receiving the Souvenir back - Sir, I consider that souvenir as one of my most pride-possessions which I could acquire painstakingly. I cannot thank you enough for having taken the efforts to re-locate it during your busy schedule, just before your retirement.

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You also mentioned that chances are rare that we'll meet frequently - though, it's <sup>(denotes)</sup> only a sentence, but I can understand the decisiveness it <sup>(denotes)</sup> denotes. I believe, this one sentence of your letter has successfully expressed all the things that remained unspoken, unuttered and un-written between you and me so far. You are very true and I am happy with your decision, Sir.

Also, I felt good about you, that at least and at least you could express your decision clearly. To reply that sentence of yours, gladly I seek to write, Sir, Your wishes are my commands, as usual.

(PTO-

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I also would like to visit you all, as and when I visit Pune, most dutifully.

With regards from me,  
my resp. parents  
and  
Heartfelt Salutes -

Ever yours

Add. for correspondence -

Cpl Pandey GS  
PWII, 7 BRD AF  
AFS Tughlakabad  
New Delhi - 110 062.

Tel 09810964298.



✓ (A good fellow!)

